

The New Jersey Shore...

A SOLID TRIANGLE

*North Shore Looks to Future
For a Change From Present
Status in Which Most Towns
Rise on Flood of Vacation
Cash, Ebb With Homegoing Tide*

By JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM



This is the third of a series of articles on the New Jersey Shore. In the next installment, Mr. Cunningham will consider the area from Shark River to Manasquan River inlets.

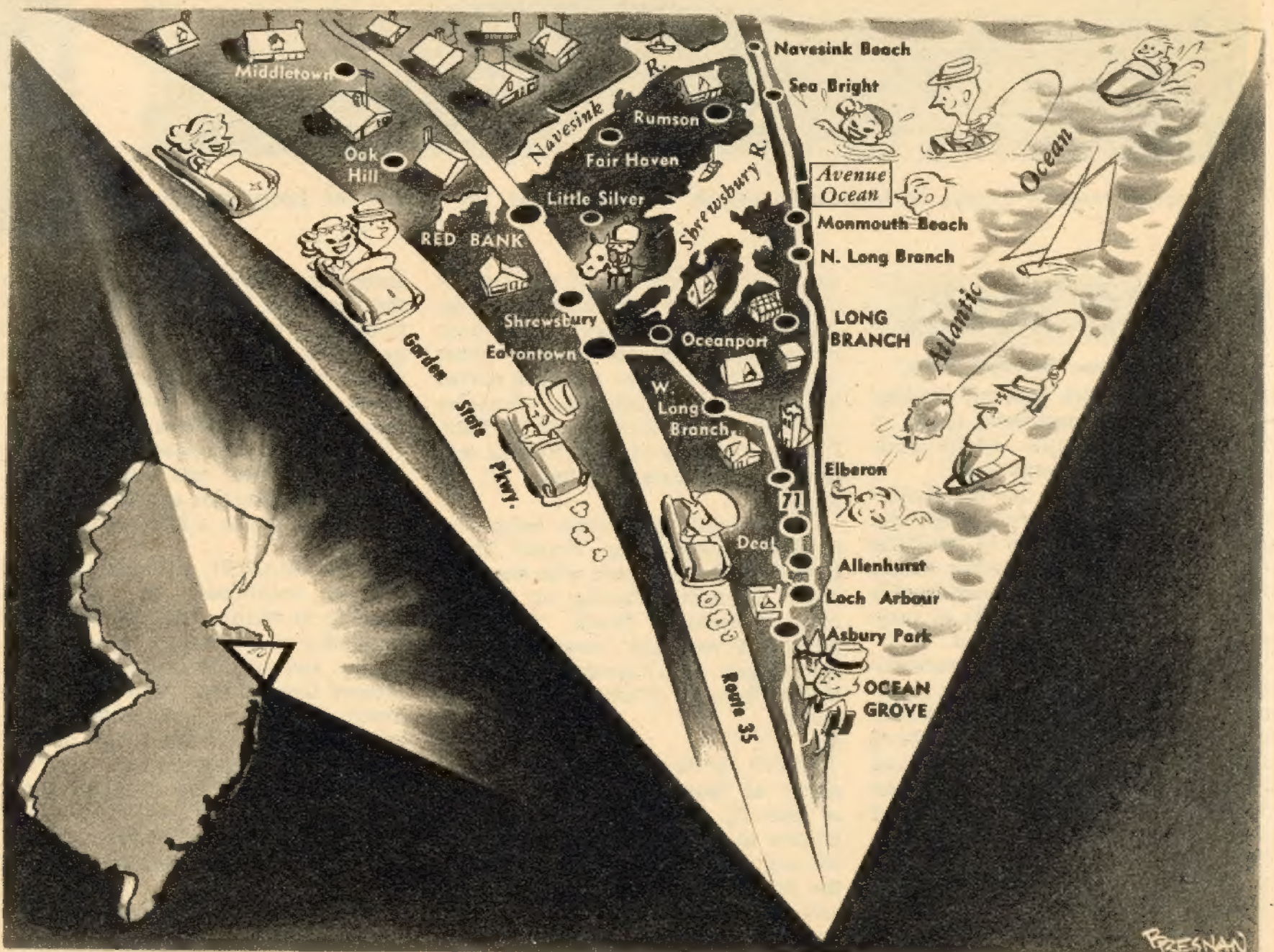
Casino, built in late 20s, at southern end of Asbury Park boardwalk. At right is Wesley Lake which also borders on Ocean Grove.

DOWN in a little triangle in Monmouth County the green New Jersey mainland meets the blue Atlantic Ocean on uniquely solid terms, and there the shore is at its stable best—its gold-making waves and its greenback-sprouting boardwalks enriched by vital, if unspectacular, everyday living.

That triangle—the North Shore—is loosely bounded on the east by the ocean, on the west by the Garden State Parkway and on the north by the Navesink River. It stands, more or less, on its point at Ocean Grove. Here, in an area of perhaps 125 square miles, the Parkway is booming honest-to-goodness year-around living. Here, too, industry for two decades has been putting some economic starch in a region long washed only in salt water.

That is not to deny the value of the North Shore's narrow strip of sea-caressed sand. The ocean-front towns between Sea Bright and Ocean Grove rise on a flood of vacation cash in June, ebb in September as dollars fall away with the homegoing tide. Good July sunshine and sea air restore brightness to the eyes and quickness to the step of North Shore entrepreneurs as they do to all Shore businessmen.

Nevertheless, towns like Asbury Park and Long Branch have a year-around vigor over and above summer trade. Their boardwalks in off-season, except for an occasional Asbury Park convention, are as dead as last summer's seaside romances. Inland a few



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Crowd-packed auditorium at Ocean Grove during Evangelist Billy Graham's series of sermons last year. LEFT: Structure's exterior view with statue of Rev. Elwood Stokes, first director, located in square.



Surfboat rests in cradle at Monmouth Beach, an oceanfront town north of Long Branch.



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blocks, though, both have all the bustle and hustle of mainland towns of 25,000 to 30,000 people—which is exactly what each happens to be.

The key word here is "mainland." Much of this North Shore is good solid earth coming right down to meet the ocean, unusual for the Jersey Shore, where 90 per cent of the beachland is a string of sandy bar islands at varying distances off the mainland.

North Shore mainland characteristics are readily apparent: in the prominent ridge bisecting the peninsula between the Navesink and Shrewsbury rivers, in the good stands of hardwood trees still seen in many places, in the abundance of fresh water streams and lakes—rare so close to the briny sea. This is, by and large, green land, and that helps coax people to the triangle for year-around living.

The most obvious meeting of mainland and ocean is where the bluffs of Long Branch drop 25 to 30 feet to

ocean level. Even in the short space of two centuries of recorded time the Atlantic has eaten the bluffs back more than 1,000 feet. Three times since 1875 Ocean Ave. has been moved back from the crumbling precipice and once more it is being shifted back. Even as recently as 1956 roaring seas threatened to tumble a hotel off the heights.

As the bluff has fallen before relentless waters, Long Branch sands have shifted northward with the long-shore currents. Starting at what is now Monmouth Beach, the sand pushed across the mouths of the Shrewsbury and Navesink rivers and closed Rumson Point off from the ocean.

TODAY the sandy North Shore area north of Monmouth Beach is held in place by a solid sea wall, a granite tribute to the never-ending desire of the sea to move that sand again. Often the Atlantic has threatened Sea Bright and even the high wall can't keep away entirely the power of a hurricane.

Few resorts on the Jersey Shore

suffer as badly from the battle with the ocean as Long Branch. Seventy-five years ago Long Branch had no peer among American resorts; these days even its most fervent admirers admit it is no Gold Coast—and that may in the final analysis be a tribute. People who are serious about Long Branch's present and future can become ill at thoughts of what the Gold Coast days did to a fine resort.

LONG BRANCH attracted its first summer vacationists in 1788, grew steadily in stature until by 1850 only Cape May could claim to be on a par. Happy and uncomplicated traditions pleased Long Branch visitors; they followed docilely the swimming flags—red meant gentlemen only on the beach, white meant women only. For years the gentle folk laughed about the day a joker hoisted both red and white flags at once ("which created some awful squinting and no little confusion").

Two great waves swept over the nation when the Civil War ended—a gilt-edged wave of materialism verging on debauchery and a gilt-edged wave of

religious fervor bordering on fundamentalism. The two met head-on along the North Shore, rising respectively at Long Branch and Ocean Grove and eventually meeting with an impact which has echoed down through the years.

The rise of Long Branch started on a high enough plane, beginning when Ulysses Simpson Grant, war hero and soon-to-be President, arrived in 1867 for a midyear visit. Grant liked the bluffs and agreeably accepted a home given him by influential men who vacationed in Long Branch. Things picked up after the nation's capital each summer rested serenely on the bluffs.

THE rich came—the old rich and the nouveau riche. The prominent came—those prominent in business and in the theater. The bored and the high-spirited came. Once the bluffs and the exciting possibility of mixed-up flags had been enough, but most of these new people needed constant amusement and they could pay for it.

As naturally as darkness follows the sunshine, the dice rollers and the rou-



Airview of Asbury Park (left) founded by James A. Bradley, whose statue (above), faces resort city's famed Convention Hall.

lette spinners and the famed ladies of the evening arrived at Long Branch. One town official proudly proclaimed Long Branch to be "The Monte Carlo of America." Monmouth Park Jockey Club started its track in 1870 to give the wealthy a chance to become poor. Those who hated fresh air could lose their money in smoke-filled, gold-domed gambling houses, particularly those made famous by Phil and John Daly.

HIGHER and higher mounted the pace. The gamblers identified themselves with Long Branch in such homey little ways as giving money to fire departments. (There is still a Phil Daly Hose Co. in town.) America's burgeoning industrial might created fortunes overnight and many a million went to build fabulous homes on the bluff. Diamond Jim Brady and Jim Fisk and their camp followers and hangers-on frequented the Branch. No resort by 1885 matched Long Branch in glitter veneered over dangerous hollowness.

A few miles down the strand at Ocean Grove, a counter-wave swelled,

also with somewhat deceptive beginnings.

Ocean Grove typified the many camp meetings of the day, when huge crowds gathered under tents to hear powerful voices warn them of the consequences of sin. Several camp meetings started along the Jersey Shore—at Ocean Grove, at Sea Grove (Cape May Point), at Ocean City, at Island Heights, at Seaside Park and at Atlantic Highlands. Only Ocean Grove survived to the full extent envisioned by the founders.

THE barrenness of the North Shore attracted the Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Assn. in 1869. Except for Long Branch, not more than 100 persons lived on the beaches between Shark River and Atlantic Highlands. One family lived in what is now all of Ocean Grove and Asbury Park. The entire area from Long Branch to north of Sea Bright was owned by the Widow Wardell in 1865, her claim being based mainly on the fact that her boys always "whipped" any other boys they caught gathering driftwood on the beach.

Ocean Grove grew rapidly. By 1891 as many as 6,000 people attended a single camp meeting service. Two years later Rev. Elwood Stokes, first president, broke ground for the remarkable auditorium (engineers still marvel at it). Its seven main trusses, sound after all these years, stretch over 151 feet and cover an area capable of seating well over 9,000 people.

THE Grove never clashed openly with the Branch. That remained for one of its sons, James A. Bradley, the self-made New York brush manufacturer who in 1870 came for a rest at Ocean Grove and wound up buying 500 acres of briars on the north side of Wesley Lake. Bradley named his wretched and uninhabited wilderness Asbury Park, in honor of Bishop Francis Asbury, first Methodist minister to be ordained in the United States.

Bradley, known as "a benevolent czar with a twirling foot rule," wielded the most influence exhibited by any single individual anywhere along the New Jersey Shore. He laid out streets and made them wide and straight; he built cottages and hotels, selling only to those who would abide by his temperance beliefs. Asbury Park was no camp meeting, but Bradley fought liquor traffic and gambling and sin—measuring sin, like most reformers, by his own foot rule.

Inevitably James A. Bradley, reformer, took up battle with Long Branch, his personal dragon. Monmouth County sent Bradley to the State Senate in 1893 and a year later he cast the deciding vote on a bill outlawing bets on horse races in New Jersey. The bill crippled and then closed Monmouth Park Jockey Club. Long Branch's scantily supported golden dome swayed, then fell crushingly when a 1907 anti-gambling bill closed the gambling houses. People who wanted a Monte Carlo went elsewhere.

MANY persons of wealth and discrimination long since had fled from the Golden City. The exodus could be dated as early as 1880 when wealthier people moved outward to Elberon, to West End or even farther outward to Sea Bright and Monmouth Beach and Allenhurst and Deal on the south. All of these fitted men of distinction.

Elberon, named for the L. B. Brown who subdivided its 100 acres in the 1870s, became the nation's pulse for 13 days in 1881 when President James A. Garfield went there hoping to recover from an assassin's bullet which felled him in Washington on July 2. Some 2,000 volunteers built a half-mile spur from the New York and Long Branch Railroad to the Francklyn cottage on Ocean Ave. The stricken President arrived on Sept. 6, seemed to revive for a time, then died on Sept. 19.

Sea Bright gained fame in a different way; an 1889 guidebook called it "one of the gayest resorts on the coast." Its Lawn Tennis and Cricket Club, sporting the colors of the Zingaree Cricket Club of England, started its invitational tennis tournaments in 1884—and continued them until 1949 except for two wars. The world's greatest court players competed on the springy turf imported (from England, naturally) in 1886.

Monmouth Beach rose brilliantly after developers cut up the old Widow Wardell holdings in 1871. Quickly the town became a center for the wealthy and musical. Moneyed New Yorkers often entertained 50 or more guests on a weekend—and never really forgave the Nauvoo fishermen for discovering the beach first. As late as 1928 a court action to halt fishing failed, despite fervent presentations to the court that noisy commercial fishermen got up too early and that their fish smelled. The fishermen still fish on.

Minor annoyances failed to stop the flow of brilliant musicians to Monmouth Beach. Such musical personalities as Walter Damrosch and Albert Spaulding found the Beach helpful to their art. Often Spaulding played to the accompaniment of Clara Clemens, daughter of Mark Twain.

THE greatest visible display of wealth, however, stretched from the lower end of Long Branch down through Loch Arbour. Much of the monied area centered around St. James Chapel on Ocean Ave., across the street from where Garfield died. St. James in 1886 claimed a congregation whose pew holders enjoyed an aggregate wealth of 120 million dollars. Through the years seven Presidents worshiped there—Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Harrison, McKinley and Wilson. Today this "Church of the Presidents" is a historical museum, preserved only by a dedicated struggle on the part of a few persons, for all the wealth of its past pew holders.

Millions poured into huge homes between 1890 and 1910. Up went mansions like Solomon P. Guggenheim's 100-room "Aladdin's Palace," James A. Hearn's one-million-dollar scale reproduction of Shakespeare's home at Stratford-on-Avon, Nellie Fern Jones' Deal showplace which later became Frank Hague's home; and Arthur Horgan's Deal Conservatoire. There were more, many more—and sometimes town folk couldn't be blamed if they wondered what the beachfront displays begot their towns.

In the early 1920s, for example, when Long Branch sought to bestir itself from a long and unprofitable sleep, town officials bitterly reflected that the days of golden glory left the city nothing. Deep ruts filled Ocean Ave. Dilapidated mansions and the decaying gold-domed gambling houses stood along the avenue like haunted houses. Not one cent of the billions flipped at roulette wheels and galloping ponies had gone to save the ever-collapsing bluff.

ONE leader summed it up in 1923: "Long Branch was gold-domed to death."

Still, Long Branch fought back in the surge of prosperity that rolled up and down the state's entire shore during the 1920s. The city made graveled Ocean Ave. a wide paved parkway, rebuilt the boardwalk, pushed a hotel boom, built its beachfront stadium for automobile races and later used the track for dog races. Some of the estates—such as George M. Pullman's acreage—were cut up for development.

By 1928, indeed, Long Branch's 6½-mile beachfront had vigor, even if the

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Only the name of this Long Branch fire fighting brigade serves as reminder of past when town was known as "America's Monte Carlo."

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blood which pumped through its veins was no longer all blue. Depression closed in by 1932, and that same year the wild Atlantic sullenly warned that Long Branch's woes weren't all economic by carving away 30 feet of bluff in a single storm.

Ocean Grove and Asbury Park those same years experienced few of the financial and erosion complications besetting Long Branch and its near neighbors. Ocean Grove had its unrelenting religious strength; Asbury Park had its James A. Bradley.

IF ever a resort community could be called uncomplicated, the community is Ocean Grove. The Grove has never deviated from its original aim to provide a quiet community where those who seek Methodist inspiration can find it. Its annual August camp meeting is as great a Methodist magnet as was the first camp meeting in 1870.

Hundreds of noted personages have spoken in the huge auditorium—Presidents, congressmen, state officials, high Methodist leaders, vibrant evangelists from Billy Sunday to Billy Graham. President Grant, who spoke in Ocean Grove on a Sunday long ago, posed a problem. Should he be permitted to drive a carriage into town despite the law forbidding such traffic? Grant, as much at home in Ocean Grove as in Long Branch, replied:

"Who should regard and uphold the law, if not the chief magistrate of the nation?"

That Sunday shutdown still pertains. Everything comes to a standstill on Sunday—automobiles cease to run; as many as 2,500 cars leave Ocean Grove before Saturday midnight in summer. The beach is empty. Few promenade the boardwalk. This is not calculated to please all who disagree on how Sunday should be kept; one writer in an article in 1953 apologized with probably unconscious naivete: "Ocean Grove is not as bad as some say."

Asbury Park stayed much under the personal wing of James Bradley until he died in 1921. Many felt the founder's stubborn refusal to see his town change set the Park back a couple of decades. Bradley, on the other hand, thought his town so altered that in his declining years he said:

"I would have been much happier in my old age if I had never heard of the place."

James Bradley, as noted, fought vice on his own terms. He also fought to keep Asbury Park exactly as he planned. He fought to keep the beachfront under his control, but when the city threatened condemnation he sold his holdings east of Ocean Ave. for \$100,000. The reformer's interest in Asbury Park began to decline, although he held fast to his huge holdings in the city.

THE city administration pushed rapidly to develop its beachfront. It improved the boardwalk, built wood piling jetties and in 1905 erected a handsome boardwalk arcade. Arthur Pryor of West Long Branch, an unknown, came in 1904 to give the first

of the public band concerts which are still a summer feature. Pryor, who later wrote "The Whistler and His Dog" among his 250 original compositions, became a permanent fixture for 16 years. He captured world attention but between 1926 and his death in 1942 he still returned often for concerts.

Asbury Park got around to dedicating a statue to James A. Bradley in June 1921, the very month the bearded patriarch died. One year after Bradley's death his large real estate parcels hit the market and Asbury Park soared to its biggest decade of growth. In 1922, by way of illustration, building shot up to treble that of 1921. The boom culminated in construction of Convention Hall and the Casino in 1928 and 1929, and widening of the boardwalk to 60 feet in 1936.

THE years, in general, have been reasonably kind to the North Shore, now virtually one municipality from Sea Bright to Fletcher Lake. Streets run together from town to town, tied together by Ocean Ave. Time hasn't changed everything, by any stretch of the imagination. The area from Loch Arbour up through Elberon is still lined with fine mansions, many of

from 1920, is the acknowledged duchess of the North Shore. Her wide streets, thanks to James Bradley, are as useful in the automobile age as they were decorative in the four-in-hand era. Her boardwalk, while not comparable in size or lavishness to Atlantic City, is not so confusing or garish either.

MOST seasonal visitors to Asbury Park's boardwalk and beaches would be surprised at the size and vitality of the year-around city separated from the resort area by six or seven blocks jammed with boarding houses and medium-size hotels. The greatest contrast between Atlantic City and Asbury Park is the fact that Atlantic City's business is all within about three blocks of the boardwalk—and dependent on the Walk—while Asbury Park's business leads an inland year-around life of its own.

The third of the North Shore's big three—Long Branch—continues to suffer from the ravages of the sea. It takes no erosion expert to see the immensity of the problem, which the city hopes a new sea wall will alleviate. Ocean Ave., three times shifted in the past, is in the process of being moved again.

Part of the northbound lane of Ocean Ave. has been converted into a boardwalk adjunct, with tables and chairs set on the asphalt street. Hurricanes in the last 15 years have ripped away huge chunks of the boardwalk; it is unlikely the boardwalk will ever again stretch over miles as it once did.

Erosion is a continuing problem of all the North Shore. The sea wall at Long Branch is hidden by the bluff, but the sea wall from Monmouth Beach north to Sandy Hook is a grim, ever-present reminder that the Atlantic Ocean doesn't really take people seriously.

THE North Shore should get more popular because of the Garden State Parkway, particularly with the "day trippers." Some officials grumble that motorists spend precious little in town, but they could be pessimistic. Many of these down-for-the-day visitors will be returning—for two days, for a week, for a month, to buy a home in one of the inland towns. Meanwhile, 300,000 to 350,000 people flock to the North Shore every blistering weekend, sometimes coming in such numbers that a room is as hard to find as a knee-length bathing suit.

The North Shore is more solid than its ocean front. All its golden eggs, to scramble a metaphor, are not by the sea. Several industries and government installations in the area offer employment; many new home developments inspired in large measure by the Garden State Parkway are springing up. The Parkway brings industrial areas surrounding New Brunswick, Elizabeth and Newark within a reasonable morning and evening drive.

Possibly the future of this northernmost of the New Jersey Shore areas may well be as much linked to its industrial-residential character as it is to the shifting sands. The real potential of the "day trippers" may not be in what they spend this day in hot dogs—but that they may return tomorrow to invest in the North Shore as home owners.



Memorial to 20th President of U.S., James A. Garfield, stands in Ocean Park, facing Long Branch boardwalk.

them holdovers from the Gold Coast days and many of them still well kept—although scarcely a year goes by without a big auction.

Certainly Ocean Grove hasn't changed. Its Ocean Pathway, once called by National Geographic Magazine "the most beautiful short street in the United States," is still handsome in a vintage sense. The town's old street names perpetuate memories of past Methodist Church leaders and events. Ocean Grove is the one total survivor of the immense post Civil War Methodist camp meeting movement. Symbolizing the meetings are the little two-part dwellings surrounding the auditorium. The rear part is permanent wood, the front part is a tent erected in the summer.

Asbury Park, while much changed